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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJECT: KARACHI - TARGETED KILLINGS ESCALATE

Classified by: Consul General Stephen G. Fakan, Reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Since June 2009, politically motivated targeted killings have been the norm in Karachi. The advent of the new year brought an escalation of the violence, and points to potential fissures in the ruling coalition. End summary.

New Year, New Violence

¶2. (SBU) Targeted killings are part of Karachi's political landscape. However, beginning in June 2009, they flared up (reftel A). Until recently, the majority of the killings seemed to be Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM-A) versus Haqiqi Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM-H). By the end of 2009, there were 152 deaths, according to the Ministry of Interior, but other estimates place the total at 200 or more.

¶3. (SBU) With the start of the new year, a new round of violence began. The first four days brought ten new deaths, seven of whom were members of MQM-H. Then, on January 7, the body of a beheaded MQM-A worker was found. This ignited four days of violence, centered in the Lyari neighborhood, which caused an additional 47 deaths, including at least three more decapitations. By January 10, the federal government brought in the police Sindh Rangers (paramilitary) to restore order in Lyari. Under orders from Rehman Malik, Federal Interior Minister, police conducted raids in Lyari and arrested over 30 people. Protestors from Lyari took to the streets on January 11 saying the government crackdown targeted only them and not MQM supports. (Note: Lyari is a stronghold of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). End note.) PPP Members of National Assembly (MNA) from Lyari protested in the National Assembly and staged a walkout. They demanded operations in other parts of Karachi as well. On January 11, there were four more killings. MQM threatened to leave the government coalition in protest over the killings.

Politics, Gangs, and Conspiracy

¶4. (C) Lyari is the oldest inhabited area of Karachi, and home to major wholesale markets and business areas. Historically, two criminal gangs have fought over Lyari (reftel B). Lyari is the only area of Karachi which is a stronghold of PPP. The killings are a battle between the MQM, PPP, and other stakeholders for the heart of Karachi, as well as being a war between various land mafias and

criminal gangs.

¶5. (C) While this latest round of violence seems to be a battle between MQM-A and PPP; there are many theories as to the causes. According to Malik, political parties are not involved in the violence. Others believe the root cause is a land and power grab. Coloring all of this is the uncertainty regarding the future of the local government system in Sindh, as the law authorizing the current system expired on December 31.

¶6. (C) Faisal Sabzwari, Deputy In-charge MQM Media Cell, placed blame on the PPP claiming they are involved in the Lyari gang war. Without the restrained response of the MQM, he said violence would have spread into many other parts of Karachi as part of a conspiracy to destabilize Karachi. He believes that in Lyari, MQM was targeted by the gang of Rehman Dakai, who patronizes Federal Minister Nabil Gabol and Provincial Minister Rafiq Engineer. Dakai was killed by the police recently, and MQM blamed for his death.

¶7. (C) Sabzwari also blamed MQM-H for the killing of MQM-A party workers. He believes some of the Haqiqi target killers are finding refuge in the largely Pashtun area of Sherpao colony. He opined that some political heavyweights want to destabilize Karachi to keep the MQM occupied, and divert their attention from development activities.

¶8. (C) Rafiq Engineer, PPP and Provincial Minister for Katchi Abaadis (shanty towns), said the targeted killings are an effort to divert attention away from the aftermath of the December 28 bombing and arson in Karachi. It is a matter between MQM-A and MQM-H, but he also believes Haqiqi members are finding refuge in Pashtun dominated areas. He further opined that MQM always threatens to leave the

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coalition, but PPP continues to reach out to them in an effort for peace. The December 28 Ashura incident is being diverted into an ethnic conflict, and MQM wants to divide Karachi along ethnic lines.

Comment

¶9. (C) The recent uptick in violence between coalition partners MQM-A and PPP is a troubling sign for Karachi. The longer the local government system remains ambiguous, the more likely it is politically related violence will continue to escalate. The longer instability reigns in the city, the harder it will be for economic recovery to continue. End comment.

FAKAN